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ABSTRACT

Results of an evaluative study of the Texas Alternative Certification Program (ACP), conducted by the Texas Educational Agency staff during the 1988-89 school year, are reported. The first ACP was implemented in a single urban school district during the 1985-86 school year. The program was designed, in part, to address the shortage of teachers. By 1988-89, nine programs had been approved to serve 116 school districts with 869 interns-in-training. During 1988-89, approximately 16% of the new teachers in Texas were certified through alternative certification. This study of the 1988-89 program was based on a structured decomposition model that focuses attention on complex interactions and is useful in determining program processes. Five survey instruments were developed to obtain data from all stakeholders; survey items were designed to address demographics of ACP participants, ACP rule requirements and individual program requirements, and intern teaching assignments, as well as coursework and training information. Data were received from eight of the nine programs, including three independent school districts, one education service center (ESC), and four institutions of higher education. Responses from 8 program directors, 401 ACP teachers interns, 411 mentor teachers, 258 campus supervisors/administrators, and 10 university or ESC trainers/supervisors were analyzed. Results indicate that the ACP offers opportunities for a more mature population of quality individuals to enter the teaching profession without excessive time and cost barriers. A major implication of this study is that mentor training needs to be expanded so that supervision can include clinical supervision and the development of communication and conferencing skills. Research is needed to study the qualitative aspects of this program. (TJH)

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An Evaluative Study of Texas Alternative Certification Programs

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Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Boston, MA, April 16-20, 1990.

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An Evaluative Study of Texas Alternative Certification Programs

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Background

Alternative certification programs (ACP) are fast becoming a major means of training teachers in Texas. The first Texas program was implemented in a single urban school district during the 1985-86 school year to address areas of critical teacher shortage [Texas Education Code §13.035(a) and Barnes, Salmon, & Wale (1989)]. Two hundred seventy-six interns were trained and certified in that initial year. By 1988-89 nine program had been approved to serve 116 school districts with 869 interns-in-training. Requests for alternative route programs have continued, and the number of individuals pursuing teacher certification through alternative certification programs has increased dramatically. Texas Education Agency information shows that during the 1988-89 school year approximately 16% of the new teachers in Texas were certified through alternative certification.

Since alternative route programs were established in 1985, three distinct models have emerged with respect to the delivery of training. A higher education model provides university coursework and cooperation with school districts to supervise field-based training while the intern is serving as teacher of record. Some higher education models lead to a master's degree if additional coursework requirements are met. Higher education models are similar to the case studies in mathematics and science alternative certification programs developed by other states and discussed as case studies in Hudson, et al. (1988).

An educational service center (ESC) model provides training through contact or clock hour delivery systems and relies more heavily upon field-based experiences with a mentor teacher. There is limited higher education interaction and supervision in this model, although programs do require some higher education coursework to meet State Board of Education rule requirements.

The third model is a local school district model. Three large districts--Dallas, Fort Worth, and Houston--have developed their own programs to address teacher shortage areas and attract quality candidates to their districts. Independent school districts utilize a combination of the above training delivery systems with a minimum amount of coursework being provided by district personnel through clock hour presentations. The Houston model is discussed as "Case study 6" in Hudson, et al. (1988), and other Texas programs are discussed in Barnes, Salmon, & Wale (1989).

The purpose of this paper is to report the results of an evaluative study of the Texas Alternative Certification Program conducted by Texas Education Agency staff (Irons & Wale) during the 1988-89 school year. This study was based on a structured decomposition model developed by Gary Borich at The University of Texas at Austin (Borich, 1989; Borich & Jemelka, 1982). This method focuses attention upon complex interactions and is useful in examining how a program achieves the results it does.

Instrumentation

Five survey instruments were developed, one for each group mentioned in the sample above. Survey questions were designed to address demographic information about ACP participants, ACP rule

requirements, ACP individual program requirements, intern teaching assignments, as well as coursework and training information.

Sample

Information was received from eight of the nine implemented approved programs: three independent school districts, one education service center (ESC), and four institutions of higher education. In addition to responses from the program directors (N = 8), data included responses from ACP interns (N = 401), mentor teachers (N = 411), campus supervisors/administrators (N = 258), and university or ESC trainers/supervisors (N = 10).

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected with the assistance of ACP directors who distributed the surveys for their respective programs, collected the data, and submitted it to the Agency for analysis. Data were analyzed with SAS statistical descriptive procedures and reported as frequencies and means. Participant comments and/or concerns were tabulated.

Findings and Discussion

The inception of alternative teacher certification in Texas happened to coincide with a downturn in the state's economy. Consequently, it is often assumed that this program primarily attracts the unemployed as a temporary means of "making ends meet" until another position outside of education can be found. Current data does not support that assumption. Over 75% of the respondents to the survey indicated that they had made a conscious decision to change careers or seek a second career. Reasons, such as job security, were given; but only 4% actually reported being unemployed when they decided to enter an alternative route program. Ninety-five percent of the respondents

indicated having long-range career goals in the field of education. Nearly 52% wish to continue as classroom teachers; 19% would like to become educational support personnel (counselors, librarians, diagnosticians, etc.); while 20% would like to become school administrators. Only one percent of the respondents viewed teaching or education as temporary employment.

The alternative certification program, by its nature, has attracted a larger percentage of more mature individuals than traditional undergraduate programs. Only 10% of the interns who responded to the survey were below age 24, while nearly 40% were between the ages of 25 and 30 and 30% between the ages of 31 and 40; 10% of the interns reported being between 41 and 50 years of age, and another 10% over the age of 50.

The ethnically diverse background of interns responding to the survey closely reflected the overall makeup of the 1988-89 cadre of interns as a whole (i.e., 52% minority) as well as that of the State. The interns were 14.7% Afro-American; 36.2% Hispanic; 47% White, Non-Hispanic; and 1.9% Other.

Interns were queried on their perceptions of program entry requirements. For program entry eligibility, State Board of Education rule requires that candidates have at least a 2.5 grade point average (GPA) on a 4.0 system, overall and in semester hours required for certification. nearly 38% of the respondents reported entering the program with GPAs between 2.5 and 2.9, while 59% had higher than a 3.0 GPA (3% did not respond to this question). When questioned as to the appropriateness of the minimum 2.5 GPA, 74.6% thought it appropriate; 23.2% too low; and only 1.5% thought it too high. Of the school

administrators surveyed, nearly 80% thought the entry requirement was adequate, while 15% thought it was too low. Seventy-five percent of the program directors agreed with the appropriateness of the 2.5 GPA requirement, while 25% thought it was too low. In fact, two programs actually exceed the State minimum requirement for entry.

Prospective interns are also required to pass a state-approved basic skills test. All program directors agreed with this provision as did the vast majority of interns, 77%.

A further requirement involves a pre-assignment field experience (student contact hours). Minimum hours are established by each program and vary from 10 to 40 clock hours. Fifty percent of the interns considered the contact hours to be adequate in their particular programs, while 28% would have preferred additional time in the classroom prior to assignment as teacher of record. When reflecting on their pre-assignment field experiences, 7% of the intern respondents remarked that they would like to have seen more structured observations and/or more hands-on experience in actual teaching situations. Only 5.5% would have decreased the number of student contact hours, and 6% would have omitted them entirely. While 75% of the program directors found the field experience requirement to be adequate, 12% reported difficulty in finding summer schools available for candidate placements and would prefer that this be an option/recommendation rather than a requirement.

The alternative certification program in Texas is an induction model, and much of the training occurs not in university coursework or in workshop hours of training but in the one-to-one relationship of the

intern with the mentor teacher. Ninety percent of the interns clearly viewed the mentor as a necessary element of this training program.

State guidelines require that a mentor be at least on level two of the Texas career ladder and be certified in the area and/or at the level for which the intern seeks certification. Customarily mentors are chosen by their principals. Nearly 5% of the mentor respondents reported volunteering for such a position without being previously asked. Fifty-nine percent reported being asked by their principals to serve as mentors, while 31% were assigned without being consulted. Interns actually selected mentors themselves in slightly more than 3% of the cases.

Of course, selecting an appropriate mentor is of utmost importance. Respondents were asked to check all items they felt to be necessary prerequisites for a mentor from a list of 27 suggestions. These were categorized under the headings education/training, experience, and expertise.

The five attributes most and least chosen by the interns follow:

Most important

86.0% skills/knowledge in content

84.8% professionalism, e.g., be a role model

84.5% ability to develop a supportive relationship with interns

83.2% communication skills

80.0% classroom organization and management skills

Less important

38.6% training in teacher performance evaluation

33.4% higher education coursework taken within the past three years

32.1% a minimum of Career Ladder Level Two

16.2% previous experience in supervising interns

13.5% master's degree

This compares with the following responses by mentor teachers:

Most important

92.2% communication skills

91.4% classroom organization and management skills

90.7% ability to develop a supportive relationship with interns

89.5% skills/knowledge in content

89.0% professionalism, e.g., a role model

Less important

46.2% training in teacher supervision

32.8% at least three years teaching experience

26.2% higher education coursework taken within the past three years

26.0% master's degree

19.9% previous experience in supervising interns

School district administrators (principals) responded to the same set of criteria as follows:

Most important

92.6% communication skills

88.3% classroom organization and management skills

87.5% skills/knowledge in content

86.4% professionalism, e.g., be a role model

85.2% ability to promote student learning for all students

Less important

48.0% training in teacher supervision

38.3% five or more years teaching experience

37.2% higher education coursework taken within the past three years

31.7% master's degree

13.1% previous experience in supervising interns

The 10 university or ESC trainers/supervisors reported the following rating:

Most important

In this category there was a three- and four-way tie for importance.

90.0% expertise/training in curriculum and instruction

90.0% a minimum of Career Ladder Level Two

90.0% professionalism, e.g., be a role model

80.0% training in teacher performance evaluation

80.0% communication skills

80.0% ability to develop a supportive relationship with interns

80.0% classroom organization and management skills

Less important

40.0% master's degree

40.0% higher education coursework taken within the past three years

40.0% expertise in classroom observations

30.0% at least three years teaching experience

30.0% five or more years teaching experience

Interestingly enough, while university or ESC trainer/supervisors were in agreement with the other groups of respondents on a number of items, they showed greater disparity from the other groups in terms of what they considered to be most important. They were the only group which considered expertise/training in curriculum and instruction to be in the most important category. They were also the only group which did not consider skill/knowledge in the content area taught to be most important. Both interns and mentors considered training in teacher performance evaluation to be less important, while the university or ESC trainers/supervisors thought it was most important. While interns placed little importance on the career ladder level of their mentors, the trainer/supervisors believed it to be important, perhaps because it is a requirement in State Board rule. Also interesting is the low ranking by trainers/supervisors of expertise in classroom observations for mentors. This may be due to a credence that their own supervision of the interns is sufficient or at least more important. While the administrators were the only group that identified the ability to promote student learning for all students as one of five most important attributes, data indicate that this category was ranked a close sixth in importance (74%) by the intern group. All groups placed less importance on the mentor's holding a master's degree or on the recency of higher education coursework.

As mentioned above, three of the four groups surveyed thought that the mentor's content knowledge and skill were important. Ninety percent

of the interns perceived their mentors as being knowledgeable in the teaching content area, and 89% as having appropriate expertise in the teaching field. If this area is of great importance, the results speak highly of the mentors chosen.

Data indicate that 84% of the interns viewed the classroom observations made by their mentors as adequate. Sixty-one percent of the intern respondents rated their mentors' support as excellent; 20.4% good; 13% fair to average; and 5% as poor. A more varied response had to do with mentor teacher conferences: 37.4% rated the conferences as excellent; 42.6% as adequate; nearly 6% reported needing more time to conference; 5% wanted less conference time; and 4.5% actually wanted to omit mentor conferences altogether. These findings indicate a need for mentor training on conferencing skills.

Monitoring teams have often recommended to alternative certification program directors that interns and mentors be placed in as close proximity as possible. This survey showed that 77% of the intern respondents were either adjacent to or in the same general area as their mentors' classrooms.

Almost 95% of the interns perceived their campus principals as having a positive attitude about alternative certification. More than 83% of the administrators themselves reported having a positive attitude about the program; 2% a negative attitude; and 6% undecided. Twelve percent of the interns reported their principals as not having had prior knowledge of the program. In fact, nearly 68% of the school administrators who responded to the survey suggested that administrators be provided with an orientation to the program prior to having interns assigned to their campuses.

The principal's support was rated excellent by nearly 65% of the intern respondents; good by 22%; fair to average by 10%; and unsatisfactory by 3%. In Texas the role of the campus principal is that of instructional leader. As such, principals are designated as primary evaluators of instruction. Evaluations of all teachers, including interns, are made using an instrument designed for the Texas Teacher Appraisal System (TTAS), and follow-up conferences are held to discuss the results. Nearly 90% of the interns reported that the feedback given by principals was useful. Interns must perform satisfactorily (i.e., meet expectations) in the classroom, as determined in TTAS evaluations by the principal and another appraiser, before being recommended for certification.

A final requirement for certification is that the intern pass the appropriate Examination for Certification of Educators in Texas (ExCET) in the content area(s) for which the intern will be certified. The test is taken during the last semester of internship. State law precludes interns from being required to take the ExCET in professional development (pedagogy). Alternative certification program directors were unanimous in supporting the content area ExCET requirement, and 63% believe that the professional development test should also be required. Interns who are, of course, most affected by the testing, generally support the content area testing requirement (75%); 40% believe that the professional development test should also be a program requirement. Since respondents completed the survey instrument during the spring of 1989, a number of interns had already taken and passed the ExCET (N = 295/401). Those interns were asked what had most prepared them for the examination. Forty percent attributed their passing the test to

previous knowledge, 35% to teaching experience, and 16% to study sessions provided within the program structure.

Since data for this study were collected, Alternative Teacher Certification in Texas has continued to expand, and a new process for program development has evolved. During the 1989-90 school year, 16 programs were approved and 12 implemented: six university-based; three school-district based; and four education service center-based. These programs serve 166 school districts, approximately 15% of the districts in the state, and are training 1,215 interns. Alternative certification continues to be a primary means of recruiting quality minority candidates into the teaching profession. The current cycle of interns is 50.4% minority and 30% male (data collected by the Texas Education Agency).

Observations, Implications, and the Need for Additional Research

The alternative certification program appears to offer opportunities for a more mature population of quality individuals to enter the teaching profession without the excessive time and monetary barriers that would normally prohibit such a population from even considering such a career option. Although the number of minority teachers has drastically decreased in the state and nationwide, alternative certification appears to be succeeding in recruiting, and especially retaining, quality minority candidates as classroom teachers.

As interns have indicated, they intend to remain in the education profession. Reports of retention rates from program directors indicate that they indeed do. This may be due to the interns' maturity as well as their conscious decision to leave former professions for the classroom--professions in which they gained an experiential background

which appears to be enriching their students and the school environment. The long term retention rate for alternatively certified individuals and the effect they have on the school milieu must be studied further.

The applicant screening process is crucial, as is the support interns are given by mentors and other supervisors during their critical first year in the profession. A major implication of this study is that mentor training needs to be expanded so that supervision becomes more than "adequate" and that it include, in addition to clinical supervision, developing communication and conferencing skills.

Another implication which may be derived from this study is the need for voicing, comparing, and discussing ideas in a collaborative manner. This need is especially apparent when contrasting the perceptions the four groups of respondents had about prerequisite qualifications for mentor teachers. The respondents who diverged the most from those who were field-based (i.e., interns, mentors, and school administrators) were the university (and to a lesser degree ESC) trainers and supervisors. Universities must become more involved in the needs of the of practitioners, and alternative certification is fertile ground for this involvement.

While the first district-based program was viewed with condescension by many colleagues in teacher education, a number of institutions of higher education accepted a challenge made by the Texas Commissioner of Education and the Commissioner of the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board in the spring of 1986 to collaborate with school districts in their search for teachers by providing an alternate route to certification. Although the challenge may have been accepted reluctantly, several cooperating colleges soon learned that rather than

depleting the ranks of students seeking certification as they had once feared, the numbers greatly increased. At The University of Texas-Pan American at Brownsville, for example, 37% of the school's population in 1986 was enrolled in the College of Education. Currently, 68% of the population is in teacher education, and the majority of those are in the alternative certification program. Further, individuals who are certified through alternative certification appear to be continuing to study education at the graduate level.

The reluctance of participating colleges has gradually subsided and is slowly giving way to a posture of support of this field-based model. All indicators demonstrate that quality has not suffered. The alternative program has stimulated and revitalized numerous certification courses in participating colleges of education either through direct involvement of faculty with outspoken interns (these generally more mature individuals appear less reticent about expressing their views, their needs, and their opinions) or through an organized process to foster greater collaboration.

Interns enrolled in university classes are able to put into practice on a day-to-day basis those theories which they are taught, and report immediately as to their efficacy. Theory is not only taught, but this field-based model allows for the immediate integration of theory with practice. Collaboration in this instance is crucial to all because, increasingly, university instructors are called upon to take a problem-solving approach to dealing with actual school room situations and to find meaningful applications for theory.

In an effort to strengthen program quality and foster the participation of higher education in alternative certification programs,

staff in the Division of Teacher Education have developed a process for program development. This process calls for consensus at every step from representatives of higher education faculty and administration; school district teachers (including former interns from pre-existing programs) and administrators, including instructional supervisors; and educational specialists from regional education service centers. Three day meetings are held to develop or refine (for pre-existing programs) a program proposal which will be submitted to the State Board of Education for approval. In this process, generic and certificate-specific pre-assignment and ongoing needs of interns are defined and compared to requirements in State Board rule; to the 1987 Standards for Teacher Education under which all university teacher education programs are approved; to ExCET objectives, both content-related and for professional development; and to criteria for evaluating teaching performance in the Texas Teacher Appraisal System. The entities present for the developmental process must then design courses or modules of instruction to meet the requirements and needs they have identified. This, of course, involves deciding which entity can best deliver each of the individual components of the training program. Once again, consensus must be reached. Such collaborative, "bottom--up" structuring/ restructuring of alternative certification programs, if proved to be efficacious, could have a major impact on curriculum for teacher education candidates, including those in traditional programs.

This study was a first attempt to look at demographic factors and certain programmatic elements of the Texas alternative teacher certification program. Research must be expanded to study qualitative aspects of this program, including the impact of alternatively certified

teachers on schools, and to verify the correctness of observations made here.

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